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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHISINAU 000466

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [MD](#)
SUBJECT: THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SMIRNOV

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Kelly Keiderling for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Transnistrian (TN) "president" Igor Smirnov took advantage of the April 30 meeting, the first with an American Ambassador to Moldova since 2001, to declaim Transnistria's Russianness and separateness from Moldova, to expound on Transnistrians' distrust of Moldovan President Voronin, and to accept grandly USG assistance to TN as long as it were not delivered through Moldova. Smirnov and his "foreign minister" expected nothing of substance to come of the working-group discussions with Chisinau officials, postulating that Voronin's working-group initiatives were merely pre-electoral posturing. Smirnov seemed a creature of a parallel, Alice-in-Wonderland world, in which he received little input about the realities of the 21st century. End summary.

Smirnov's Parallel World

¶2. (C) Transnistrian "foreign minister" Valery Litskai, deputy "foreign minister" Sergey Simonenko, a translator, a cameraman, a photographer and three notetakers accompanied Smirnov during his meeting with Ambassador Kirby and DCM Keiderling. Smirnov took the stage for most of the two-hour, one-sided presentation--the undisputed king of his court surrounded by courtiers long-accustomed to doing his bidding. Smirnov began by welcoming the "representatives from the Great Power" and explaining the history of Transnistria and the conflict. He had had luck during the Snegur and Lucinschi administrations in Chisinau, he noted, and then the negotiations stopped in 2001. (Note: Smirnov probably meant he had gained concessions and benefits for TN from Chisinau authorities during the 1990s. End note.) The Transnistrians had received nothing from Voronin, Smirnov complained. Smirnov asked rhetorically why Transnistria should engage in conversations with Chisinau. Voronin was untrustworthy, unpredictable and merely deceiving the international community with his confidence-building initiatives. The Kozak Memorandum of 2003 failed thanks to the United States, Smirnov continued, so now the Transnistrians had proposed an agreement to Voronin which didn't infringe on TN sovereignty.

¶3. (C) Smirnov gassed on about the importance of the 2006 referendum on independence held in Transnistria, not allowing the Ambassador to get a word in. A new generation of Transnistrians had grown up during the conflict who knew nothing about Moldova, Russia or the U.S., he explained. TN leaders wanted to hear directly from Transnistrians what they wanted and it was clear from the referendum that "the people" wanted independence and close relations with Russia, Smirnov claimed. Transnistria was, after all, historically Russian; it had a Russian educational system and a Russian system of government. It would be as natural for Transnistria to be the 51st state of the United States as it would be for TN to be a part of Moldova, Smirnov posited.

Transnistrians' Distrust of Voronin and Chisinau

¶4. (C) Smirnov's distrust of President Voronin was evident throughout his declamation. Chisinau stole from the Transnistrians, and Transnistrians paid taxes to the Chisinau government and bribes to

Chisinau officials, Smirnov complained. If that was democracy, he argued, Transnistrians didn't want any part of it. Smirnov wanted to know what guarantees Transnistria would have for any agreement signed with Chisinau. He concluded that TN needed an army because of the dangers and threats from the other side of the Dniester River.

15. (C) Litskai stressed the issue of distrust. Voronin wanted a unitary state, even though former U.S. Ambassador Perina and OSCE Ambassador to Moldova Hill had supported federation as a solution to the TN conflict. "We're at a dead end," Litskai stated, since a unitary state was a non-starter for TN. Moldova hadn't fulfilled any of the 70 agreements signed by the two sides, Litskai complained, so what guarantees would there be for any new agreement, Litskai asked. Chisinau only wanted to dictate terms, Litskai continued; it wasn't serious about real negotiations. The working-group mechanism to build confidence had no possibility of success, Litskai said. TN was only participating in the working groups because of pressure from the international community. In any case, TN would not sign any documents that were not guaranteed by the international community. Litskai concluded, with Smirnov nodding sagely beside him, that Voronin had proposed the confidence-building measures merely as a public relations stunt in advance of the 2009 national elections. The Transnistrians thought that Voronin would suggest in September that the two sides sign a declaration instead, by which time it would be too late for the Transnistrians to participate in the 2009 elections. (Note: The logic behind this statement is that TN participation in the elections would require a super-majority vote in the Moldovan Parliament to change Moldovan laws, an impossible political goal during the electoral season. End note.)

Smirnov Deigns to Accept USG Assistance

16. (C) The Ambassador explained that the USG sought a better understanding of TN and searched for ways to provide modest USG

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assistance to make Transnistrians' lives better. When Ambassador Kirby described USG assistance in TN, Smirnov grandly accepted assistance in the humanitarian and economic spheres, as long as the assistance went directly to TN and not through Chisinau. We didn't ask the U.S. for drought assistance, Smirnov noted further. The U.S. had offered the seeds to TN. Since agricultural producers needed to pay back loans, TN leadership had decided to allow USG seed distribution as an aid to the agricultural workers. (Note: Smirnov was making the point that Transnistria was not seeking charity and was not dependent on the kindness of the U.S. or other donors, even if it had accepted such assistance. End note.)

17. (C) Smirnov wondered about the terms of the road-building component of the proposal for a Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact, which includes renovation of two major highways through TN. The Ambassador explained that the roads would be built by whichever company won the international tender for the project and noted that TN would have to reopen a bridge across the Dniester River (the Gura Bicului Bridge) for the MCC roads project. Smirnov's response typified the grandstanding and bluster of his speech: the Moldovans attacked us across the bridges and therefore he had blown them up. If the U.S. guaranteed that Chisinau would not attack TN by using the bridge, then Smirnov would consider allowing it to be opened.

Attracting Foreign Investment to a Non-state

18. (C) Betraying his limited understanding of the world beyond the rabbit hole, Smirnov told the Ambassador to ask American investors how TN could be more attractive to them. Smirnov knew the theory behind a welcoming investment climate and ticked off TN benefits for investors: skilled TN workers, capacity to expand production, privileges for foreign investors and a mutual investment protocol signed with Chisinau. However, Smirnov did not connect such local benefits for investors to broader, structural requirements such as the existence of a real state, transparent governmental institutions and adherence to international legal norms.

Litskai Complains about Lack of Political Plan

¶9. (C) An hour and a half into the conversation, Smirnov excused himself and left Litskai to continue. Litskai followed Smirnov's approach and took his turn to lecture us. He grumbled that no plan was on the negotiating table after the Kozak Memorandum and the faded Yushenko Plan--and why wouldn't the U.S. give TN Chisinau's package of proposals developed last year? We responded that the package wasn't ours to share.

¶10. (C) Litskai stated his preference for a Luxembourg model (two languages, two ethnic groups), and then mentioned various other models that could work for TN, such as the Federated States of Micronesia, Northern Ireland and "euro-regions" such as the lower Danube or Tyrolean region. He noted that he had already begun to work with the EU ("our neighbor," he called it) through EU Special Negotiator Kalman Miszei and had asked Miszei to help Transnistrians look for European models. Meanwhile, the Transnistrians would begin to apply EU laws and standards in Transnistria.

Comment: The Queen of Hearts and the White Rabbit

¶11. (C) Smirnov seems to have created his own world, a little like the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland, in which he rules absolutely and receives little input from the real world. He knows the old Soviet Union, current-day Russia and little else. In such a hermetic world, it isn't absurd for Smirnov to suggest that Transnistria has a beneficial investment climate for American investors. Smirnov is a charismatic leader, a natural politician. He has considerable oratorical skills and an easy air of confidence. One could understand how he could sway an isolated population to understand the world his way. His lecture to us included banter about hobbies and humor, but also a pointed question about U.S.-donated seeds "infecting" TN crops with the "Colorado bug," and the inadequacy of the U.S. model for Transnistria. The Ambassador's sharp retort about the health of the donated seeds and our take-it-or-leave-it approach to U.S. assistance shows that Smirnov's charisma extends only to his population.

¶12. (C) If Smirnov is the Queen of Hearts, Litskai could fulfill the role of the White Rabbit: long-suffering, put-upon and ever-busy, his comb-over drooping to his glasses on occasion. He's smart, too, and has done his homework. He kept his place during Smirnov's posturing speech to us, speaking only when his "president" allowed him the floor and expanding upon the points that Smirnov had already made.

¶13. (C) Moldovan Minister of Reintegration Vasile Sova said on May 1 that the Transnistrians had made a decision to change to a "multi-vector" approach, diversifying their foreign relations away from a narrow focus on Russia. Our April 30 conversation with Smirnov may be the beginning of such a Transnistrian effort. We can use that opening to persuade the Transnistrians, as unrealistic as

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their behavior may appear to be, that the working groups hold some promise of mutual benefit and to urge them to the 5 plus 2 negotiating table.

KEIDERLING